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Sketches and Sonnets

JOHN J. CRESSWELL, A.R.I.B.A.

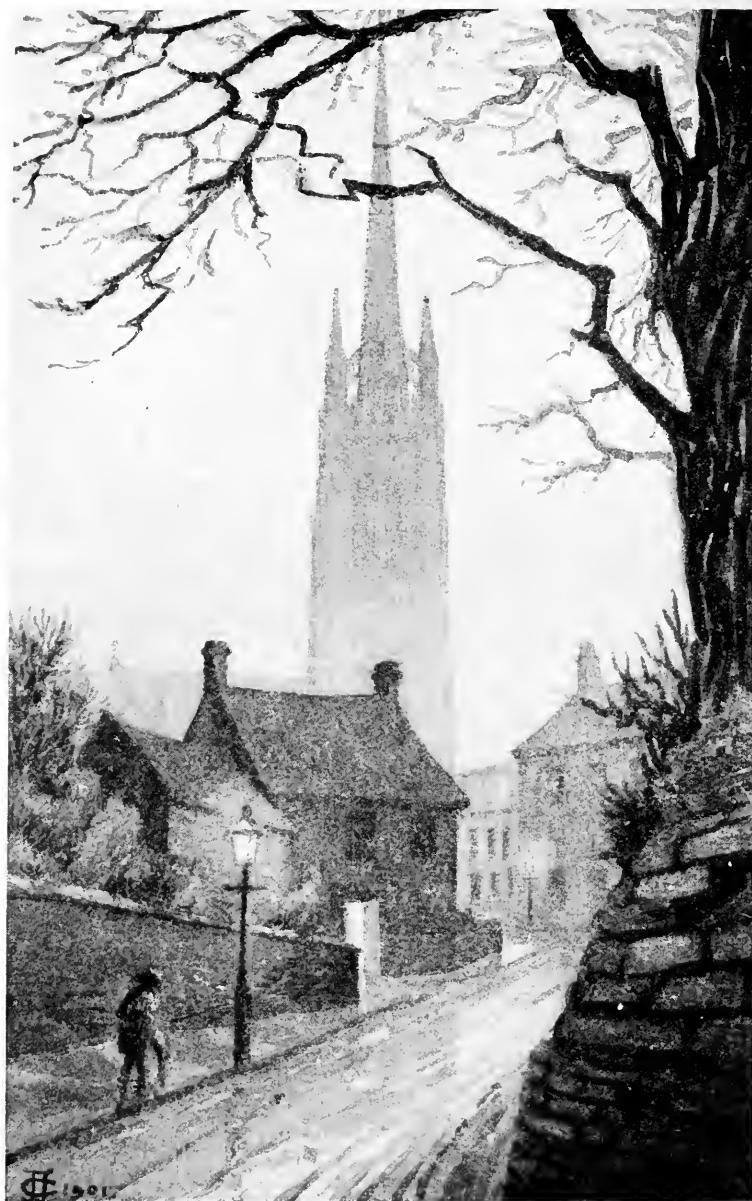


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Sketches & Sonnets

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Sketches & Sonnets

Illustrative of the Spire of St. James' Church, Louth

BY

JOHN J. CRESSWELL, A.R.I.B.A.

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Cook's

To my Father, who first showed me the beauties of poetry and painting, I dedicate this little essay in the arts he taught me to love.

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TO THE READER

“MD the XV Sonday after holy trenete this yer The wedercoke was sete Apon the broch of holy rode ewyn after Ther beyng William Aylesby parich prest with many of his breder prestes ther present haloing the said wedercoke and the stone that itt standes vpon and so conveyd vpon the said broch And then the said prestes sy[n]gyng Te Deum laudamus with organs And then the kirke wardens garte ryng all the bels and causid all the pepull ther beyng to hafe brede and ayle And all to the lofynge of god oure lady and all sayntes”*

Thus concludes, in the year 1515, the kirke wardens' account for the building of the spire of Louth. Strictly businesslike till then, occupied with costs and charges, borrowing and repayment, stoppage and recommencement, the scribe breaks out at last in an enthusiastic description of the concluding ceremonies, the joyful end crowning a glorious work.

The song begun four hundred years ago is yet resounding in the hearts of all who behold this most beautiful example of the most

* Transcription by Mr. R. W. Goulding, by his kind permission. The letters in italics are represented in the original by contractions.

poetic feature of Gothic architecture. Each generation, each loving observer takes up the strain, and I too therein would chant my part.

Laying aside for a breathing-space the tools of the trade, leaving in the background awhile technical details and material considerations, I have here attempted to set forth with pen and pencil a few of the many poetic aspects this Spire has presented to my bodily and to my mental vision. So far as my rendering of these is unworthy of the object that has inspired me, I beg your indulgence; consumed by a passionate love for that object, I claim your sympathy. Imperfect, however, though they are, I venture to hope that in these Sketches and Sonnets may be found some faint reflex of the glory of their lovely original, and that they may awake in your bosom an answering strain.

JOHN J. CRESSWELL.

Grimsby, *June*, 1906.

LIST OF PLATES

LOUTH SPIRE

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|-------------------------|
| View from Bridge Street - | - | - | - | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| (Evening light after rain) | | | | |
| View from Westgate | - | - | - | <i>Facing Sonnet I.</i> |
| From an upper window 13 Northgate | - | - | - | „ II. |
| (The Author's bedroom when a boy) | | | | |
| View from Eastgate | - | - | - | „ IV. |
| (Misty dawn—Spire in sunshine) | | | | |
| Lower Stage of the Tower, seen from the Nave | - | - | „ | VI. |
| (The Canopy over the Font is not in existence, it is the Author's suggestion) | | | | |
| View from the Grimsby Road | - | - | „ | VIII. |
| (An impression of evening, not topographically exact) | | | | |
| View from S. Mary's Churchyard- | - | - | „ | X. |
| (Site of a probably more ancient church, now disappeared) | | | | |



SONNETS ON A SPIRE

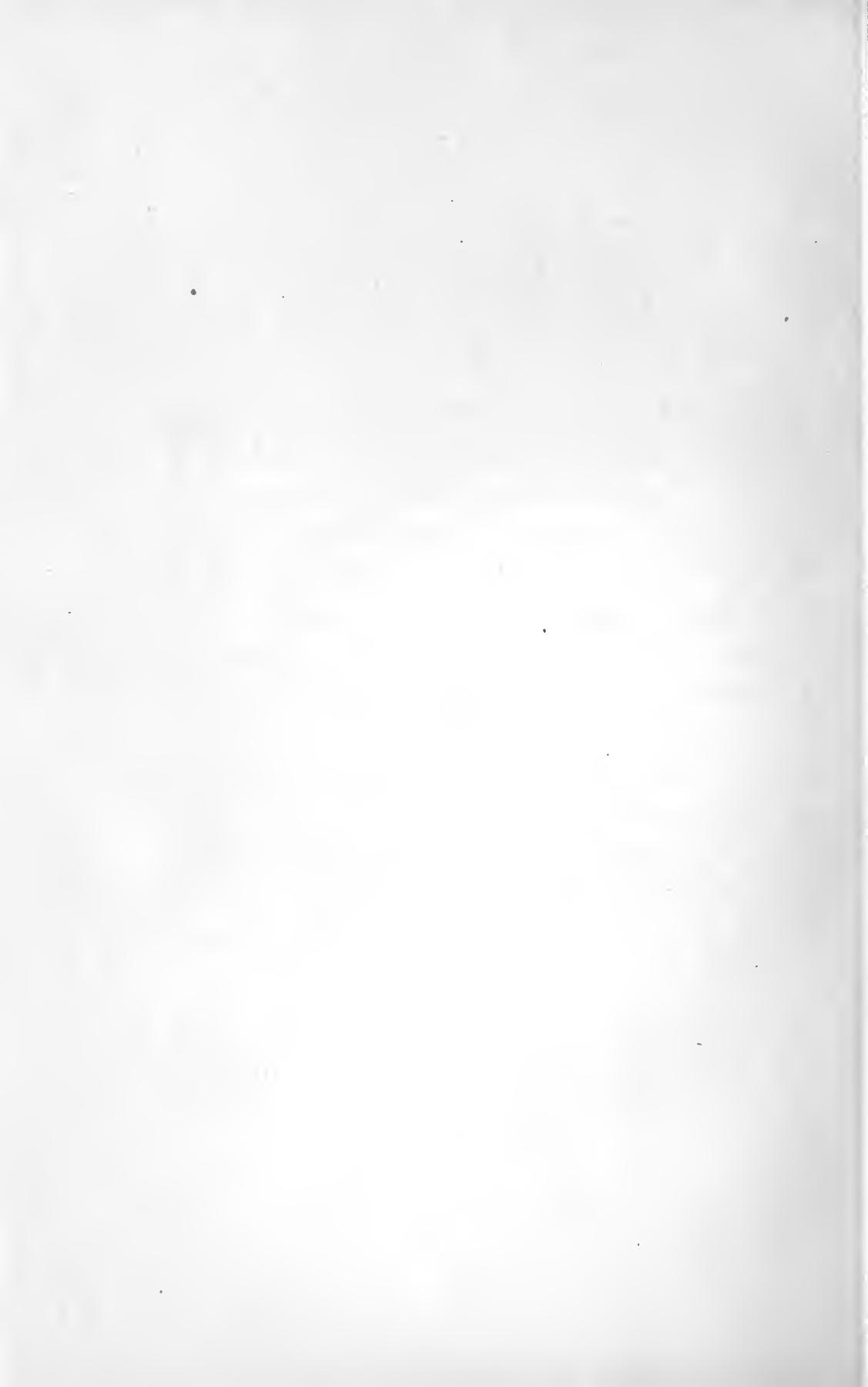
I.

O BORN of Earth yet Heaven-y-pointing Spire,
That far above the vapour-shrouded town,
From 'mid thy high tower's pinnacle-circled crown
Uprisest like a flame of hallowing fire,—
Inner as outer vision leading higher,
Above sense-gendered mists where weak souls drown,
Above the petty cares that draw them down,
Beyond unworthy hope and base desire ;—
Engendering nobler deed and better thought,
Shining through whatsoe'er of true or high
My mind hath figured or mine hand hath wrought,
When evening comes and I must cease to roam,
Bright constellation of my native sky,
Guide thou my steps, faint and world-weary, home.

II.

NO soulless pile is here of mere hewn-stone,
Such as in Egypt's deserts lonely stand,
Reared by sad captives from a conquered land,
Cursing their tyrants' gods, doubting their own :
This rose not to the sound of bitter groan
And the thong cracking in the driver's hand,
At some stern Pharaoh's arrogant command,
That royal dust might turn to dust alone :
Above their red-roofed homes, their busy mart,
The fruitful cornfield and the daisied sod,
Where they had loved and wrought, and played and wept,
Our sires, with joyous song and grateful heart,
Lifted this fair thank-offering to God,
Then with His blessing, in its shadow slept.





III.

HOW Death's huge wreckage fills this world of ours,
Furrows the fields and cumbers the sea-floor ;
His pile of slain reacheth to Earth's dark core,
And mountain-high in cruel triumph towers :
The woodland sighs a tale of vanished flowers,
Sweet purling streams are lost in ocean's roar,
The skeletons of rocks bestrew the shore,
And clouds of golden promise break in showers :
O Son of man, prophesy on these bones,
That they may live :—a miracle to see !
Member to member joineth fit and fair,
A life divine breathes through the lifeless stones,
And to the earth, from the blue heights of air,
The steeple speaks of immortality.

IV.

WHEN the fire-message of victorious Day,
That brightly glowed upon the Eastern main,
Thou answered'st from thy far-flashing vane ;—
When in the triumph-splendours of his ray
Thy light-decked beauties thou didst all display
To tree-clad slope and wide field-chequered plain ;—
At evening when thy glories all did wane,
And fading upward, left thee calm and grey ;—
In all thou wert most fair ; and though the night
Now veils thy visible form from the fond gaze
Straining to find thee in the gloom afar,
In dark and doubt as erst in hope and light,
The soul to thy sweet influence thrills and sways,
Invisible yet none less potent star.



John J. Cresswell, 1906

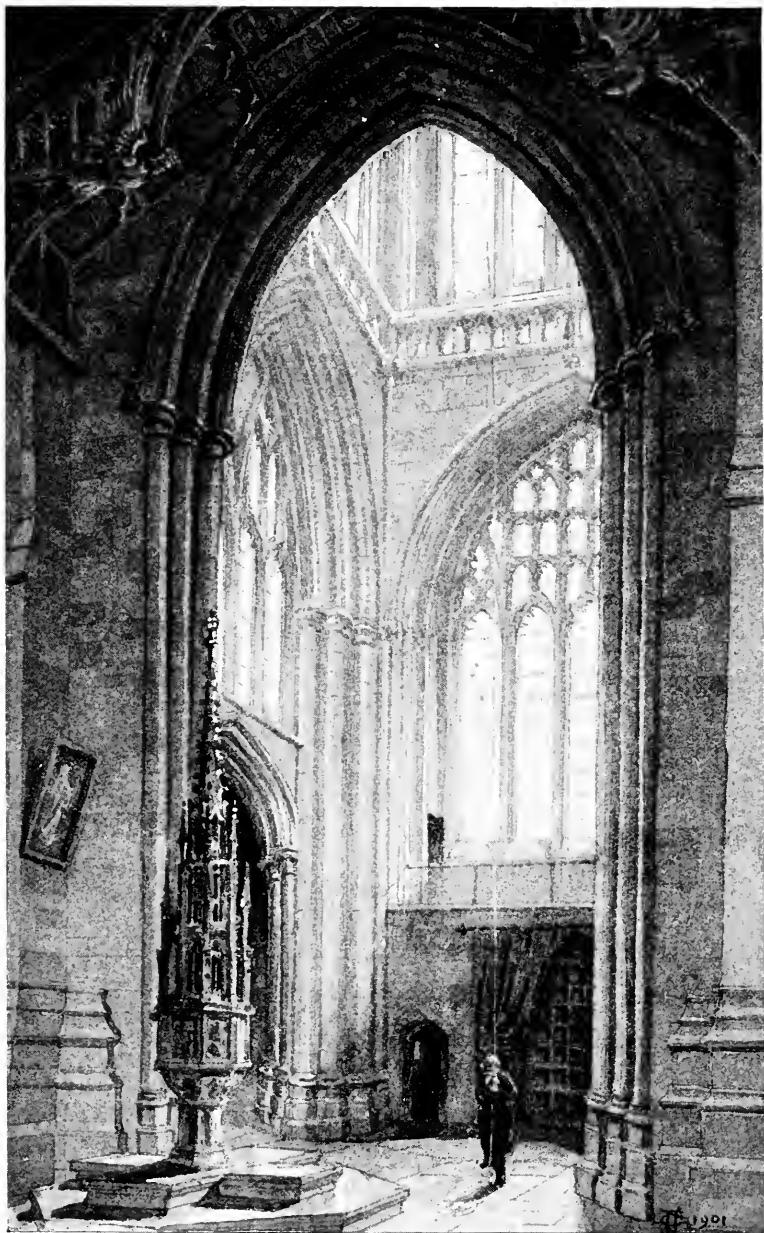


V.

THOUGH far above me, friend, and more than friend,
Guide, teacher, prophet, yet I frankly claim
With thee a kinship close as common name
And blood-relationship themselves could lend :
We both have here a certain date to spend,
Longer or shorter, and our fate the same,
After a life known or unknown to fame,
One kindly earth receives us at the end.
But 'tis the life we part with shall endure,
The good we do shall make our future heaven,
The single aim, upward, unselfish, pure,
The comfort and the courage and the joy
Which we to fellow-mortals shall have given,—
Life shall not waste these, nor shall death destroy.

VI.

TIS not my part in angel guise to soar
Crowned and serene beneath the fretted roof,
Across whose fine-strung warp a changing woof
The sun shoots all day long, nor 'mid the roar
Of buffeting winds, and clouds' relentless pour,
Nor in fair calm, from praise and blame aloof,
Steadfast to hold to heaven for men's behoof
The Cross that now they curse and now adore:
Yet I in humbler form and lower place,
Bearing in darkness that slow grows to light
Some true-hewn fragment of an upward line,
Though high-arched roof, gemmed window, angel-face,
And crowning pinnacle be out of sight,
Am still a portion of the great design.



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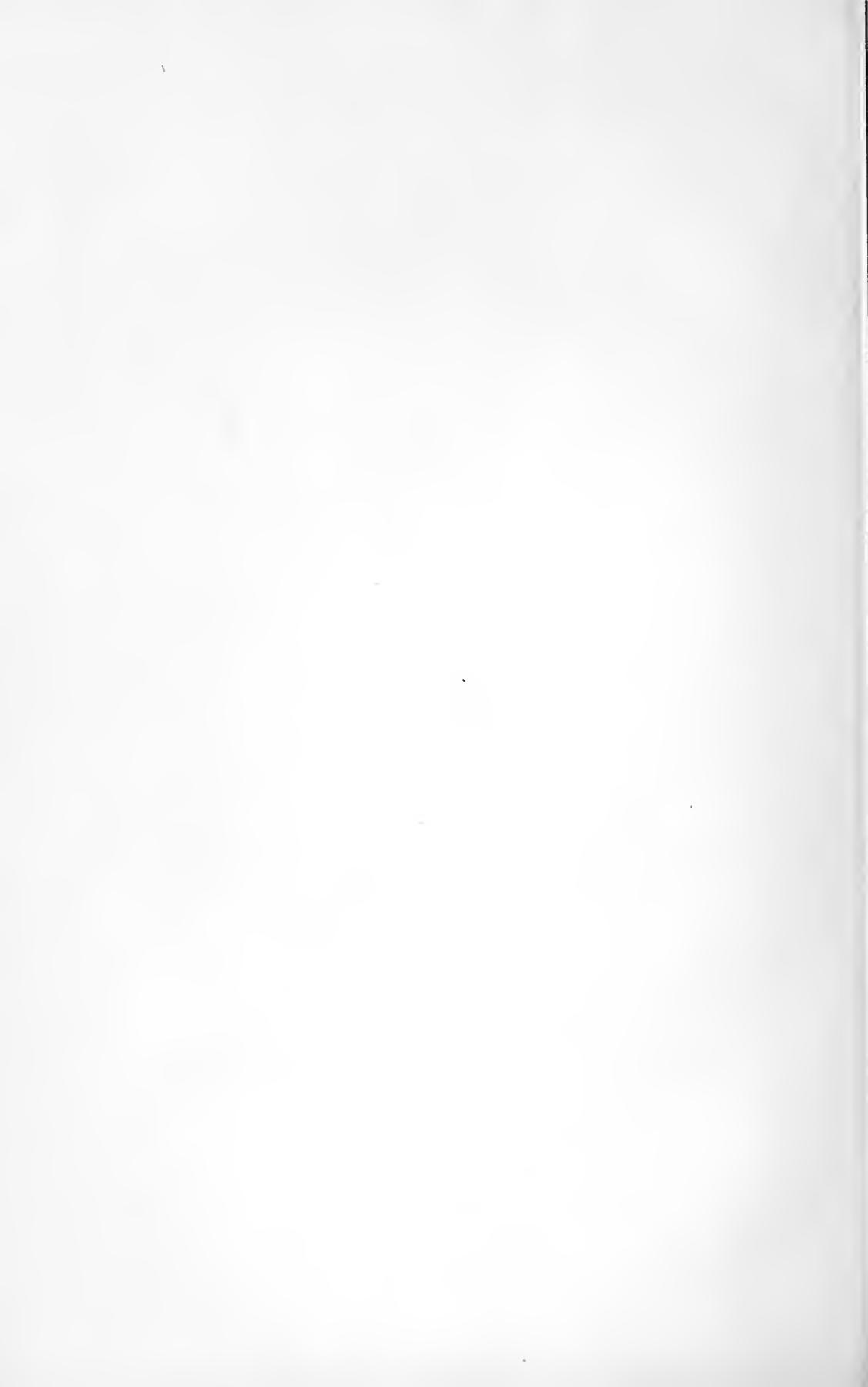
VII.

STEP over step, and round on weary round,
Faint, fainter grows the murmur of the street,
While each dim latticed loophole's due repeat
Shews further sunk the still-receding ground :
Light dies away, and dies away all sound,
Save slow and slower tread of toiling feet,
The solitary clock's dull ceaseless beat,
And whispering echoes in the stillness drowned.
But sudden bursts the sun, blows heaven's free air,—
There far abroad in the calm noon tide ray
Lie fertile plain, grey wold, and woodland gay,
Roofed with one sweeping vault of azure clear ;
Weakness forgot and sorrow cast away,
Earth shows more beautiful, Heaven shines more near.

VIII.

GRAPPLING the earth with roots that wide along
Seek the dark regions of unbroken sleep,
Thou Spire, who draw'st thy life from that still deep,
Spring'st to the sound of an immortal song ;
With buttressed piers and stately pillars strong,
And airy arches o'er and o'er that leap,
And tender stems that blossom as they creep
By carven bowers where flit the angel throng.
Still fairer grows the fabric, through and through
Shot with the sunlight's gold, the sky's sweet blue ;
Joy grows too great for merely mortal thing
To suffer and survive :—in the far sky
Closeth the strain with one exultant cry,
That through the listening vault doth sound of triumph ring.





IX.

NOT that the past, from fault and folly free,
Gives me the right to lift myself in pride,
Not that there's nought laid there I fain would hide,
Almost persuaded that it could not be ;
Nor that even now, by oft infirmity
I am not daily humbled, hourly tried,
This erring nature all too near allied
With what it yearns to cast off and to flee ;
But that, as thou hast done, I too may grow
Up from the dark, out of the mire and clay,
Each dead futility there trodden away
Forming but firmer base for surer rise,
This is my hope—though I reach not the skies,
I yet may greet afar the dayspring's golden glow.

X.

THE sun arose, and on the green-clad hill
Westward, a new-born shadow softly lay,
But there it had no long-abiding stay :
Skirting the cornfields, sweeping by the mill,
Flitting along the meadow, adown the rill,
Then to the great dark sea drifting away ;
Born with the morn, it died with dying day ;
I upward glance, to Heaven thou pointest still.
So doth this pulsing life, this daily change,
This passing strain dying while it is born,
This fleeting shadow of the infinite,
Lead but the soul unsatisfied to range
In upward quest of changeless life and light,
Eternal music, day that knows nor eve nor dawn.



John J. Cress

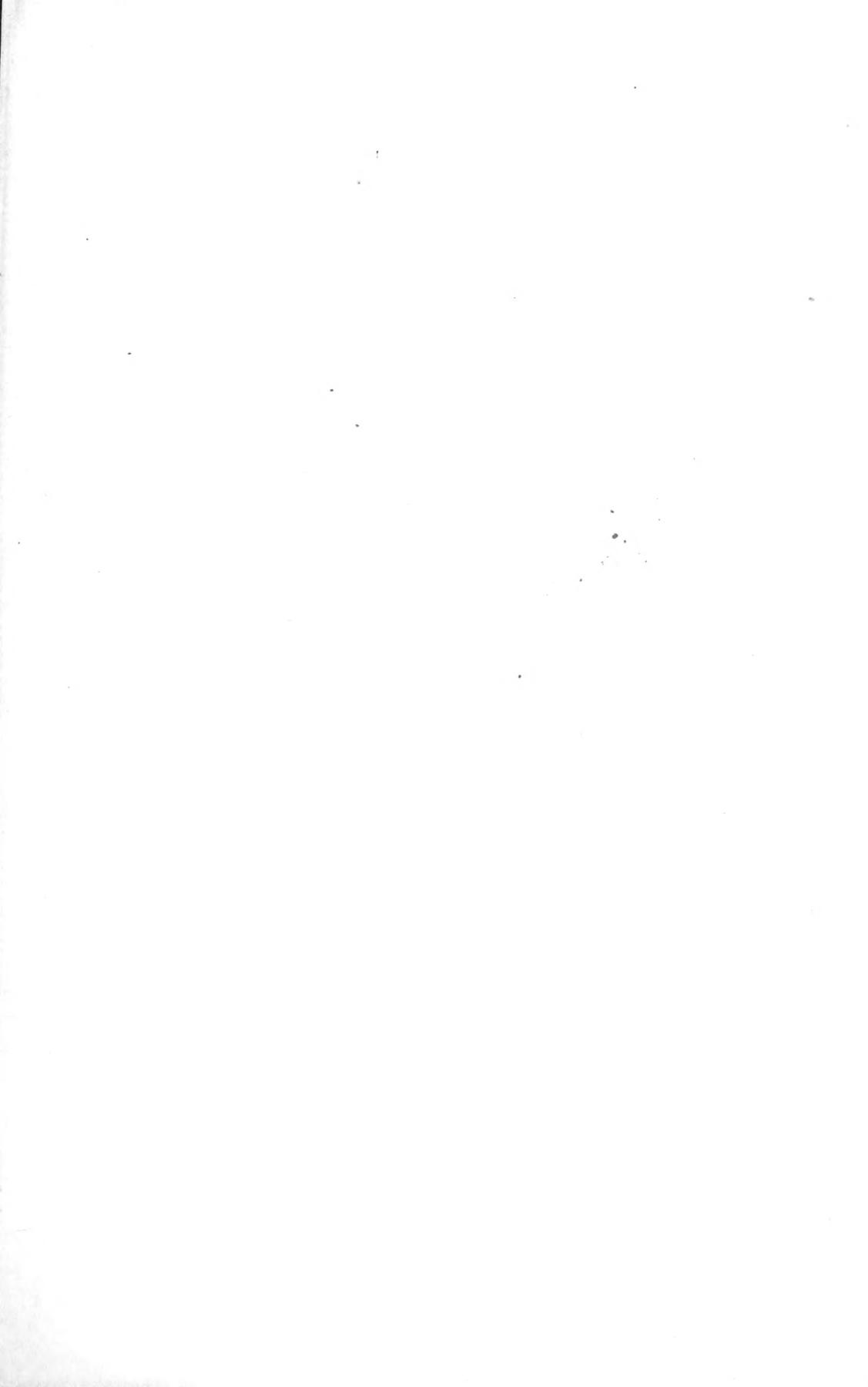


XI.

TWERE sweet to have thee alway in my sight
Or never far removed, that on my way,
A landmark thou should'st be to me by day,
And with thy chime should'st cheer the lonely night.
'Twere comfort in the growing or waning light,
When downward through the gloom my pathway lay,
To lift mine eyes to thee, who in the ray
Of Heaven's clear sunshine floatedst fair and bright.
And when the darkness fell, and I had drawn
Within thy shadow, I should feel thee nigh
Above me brooding, thou should'st gently sing
Thine evening lullaby, and 'neath thy wing
That half should hide the black void of the sky,
Content and peaceful I would rest till dawn.

XII.

NATHLESS it yet may be my fate, dear friend,
That my long weary wanderings, lone and dark,
No more shall be illumined by a spark
Of light from thee, even to the journey's end :
But when I reach the tedious track's last bend,
Attain the last steep brow, mine eye shall mark
Heaven's sunlit plains, and my glad ear shall hark
To welcoming strains that up the hill ascend.
There stand the walls, jasper and amethyst
And golden domes, and gates of pearl entire,
By the dawn-light of day eternal kissed,
And 'mid the peaks that pierce the unclouded sky,
Fairest, best-loved of all, O glorious Spire
Thy mortal form transformed, beauteous immortally.



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